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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 154 (2014) 509 – 513

Procedia
Social and Behavioral SciencesTHE XXV ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, LANGUAGE AND
CULTURE, 20-22 October 2014

The Phenomenon of Linguistic Globalization: English as the Global Lingua Franca (EGLF)

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Abstract

The conference paper considers changes taking place in the world system of languages as a result of the English language transformation into the Global Language. The most important feature of ELF is emphasis on its function, i.e. its use as a means of intercultural communication, and not on its form, which is subject to the influence of the speaker's first language. Therefore, foreign language education should be reorganized with a view of transition to multilingual teaching in which English is regarded as the language of worldwide communication that does not require acquisition of any system of national values and does not impose any economic political or cultural views.

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Peer-review under responsibility of National Research Tomsk State University.

Keywords: Global Lingua Franca; linguistic globalization; language education

1. Introduction

The ongoing processes of globalization have made an impact on the most different aspects of life of contemporary society. In the information society of the globalized world, there is a pressing need for a common language of communication, which would make it possible to overcome interlingual and intercultural barriers standing in the way of integrating nations into a common economic and cultural area. Undoubtedly, due to its wide spread in the world, English is such language, and English language skills alongside with skills in one's native language become a norm. The English language has turned into a widely accepted means of international

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communication, with the number of speakers of English as a second language (L2) considerably exceeding the number of native speakers of the English language. In this connection, it is appropriate to speak about English used in the function of a vehicular language to connect people with different language backgrounds as the global lingua franca (EGLF). The term “lingua franca” is usually used to refer to a language functioning as a means of interethnic communication. The most widespread languages of the world (apart from English, this group of languages also includes French, German, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Arabic and Hindi) are the languages of international and interethnic communication that have traditionally played the role of regional “lingua francas”. However, at present the English language has acquired the status of a language of global communication, and as such it presents a unique phenomenon that has no parallel in the history of the world languages. English as the Global Lingua Franca (EGLF) has become a means of universal communication not only between the native speakers of English and speakers of English as the second language, but also between people with different native languages. In spite of interest in the nature of global English and the changes that must be made in teaching English in conditions when it is no longer regarded as a foreign language, English is still taught around the world as one of the major national standards.

In this paper we investigate the following questions:

1. What is the nature of global English used for worldwide communication (EGLF)?
2. How should language education be reorganized to answer the challenges the new global status of English sets before the English language teaching community?

The structure of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we explore the questions connected with the characteristics of the new linguistic phenomenon – English as the global lingua franca and aim to problematize the debate in the academic world about its nature and its place among other Englishes. In Section 3, we raise the question of the English language teaching in new conditions when English has become the universal language of the globalized world. Section 4 summarizes and concludes the paper.

2. The nature of English as the Global Lingua Franca

The notion of “English as the Global Language” reflects a completely new phenomenon, even though many researchers of the use of the English language for international communication had undertaken a series of research studies of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as distinct from research of the English language usage by native speakers themselves yet long before it acquired the global status at the turn of the 20th century. In early 21st century, as Anna Mauranen writes in the foreword to the collection of articles “English as a Lingua Franca” published in 2009, research into the use of the English language as ELF became one of the most vibrant fields of studies (Mauranen & Raita, 2009, p. 2.). Mauranen describes the changes that have taken place in less than two decades from the start of studying the peculiarities of the English language use in international communication: “The English language has without doubt established itself in a position of a global lingua franca. Alongside with this status, it has become a symbol of our times together with globalization, social networking, economic integration and Internet” (Mauranen, & Raita, 2009, p. 1).

At present, when English in its role of the global language as a new phenomenon is becoming one of the major components of globalization (Gural, & Smokotin, 2014), there are numerous attempts in the research community to determine its place among different linguistic variants and varieties as well as to single out its characteristic peculiarities making it the universally accepted means of worldwide communication (Seidlhofer, 2001). In view of the fact that the change of the world system of languages as a result of which the English language has acquired the global status has been brought about in a tempestuous process, defining English as a global language, particularly in its form of EGLF, and describing its peculiarities is still a matter of heated debates among researchers. Within the framework of the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) project, initiated by Barbara Seidlhofer and Anna Mauranen in 2005, different aspects of English as a lingua franca (ELF) have been considered, with particular emphasis on its grammatical, lexical and phonetic forms. ELF is regarded here as a “contact language” used as a means of communication between people speaking different native languages (Firth, 2009). A characteristic feature of ELF is emphasis on its function, that is its use as a means of intercultural and interlingual

communication rather than on its form (the grammatical and phonetic correctness), which is subject to the influence of the speaker's native language (Cogo, 2008). Therefore, ELF may be regarded as a variety of English simplified to some degree, but not primitive or defective since ELF speakers are able to express their thoughts (starting with simplest utterances and ending with complicated arguments), effectively using the available language forms and functions.

The ELF researchers have paid particular attention to the impact of the speaker's L1 on the way English is used for international communication. It has been pointed out that since ELF is a medium connecting speakers of different languages, it falls under the influence of the speaker's native language and culture both at the phonetic and lexical-grammatical levels as every ELF user in interlingual and intercultural communication adapts it to his or her own needs with due account of the structure of the native language and its culture (Firth, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). As a result, the ELF speakers need not follow strictly linguistic and cultural norms of the English language native speakers since ELF communication frequently occurs without their participation.

In describing ELF, the researchers single out the following characteristic features (Meierkord, 1998; Gnutzmann, 2000; Jenkins, 2000; Knapp, and Meierkord, 2002; Cogo, 2008; Hülmbauer et al., 2008 etc.):

1. ELF lexical and grammatical peculiarities

- a tendency to drop s-endings in verbs in the present tense for 3rd person, singular (3rd person singular zero), as in *I think, he think*;
- interchangeability of relative pronouns 'who' and 'which', as in *things who, people which*;
- using nouns without a plural form in Standard English in a plural form, as in *knowledges, advices*;
- shift in the use of articles according to the norms of Standard English (including the use of zero articles);
- invariant question tags, as in *you are leaving today, isn't it?*;
- increased explicitness of utterances by using extra words, as in *black color instead of black, how long time instead of how long etc.*;
- a new use of morphemes, as in *angriness, importancy*;
- a wide use of such universal verbs as 'have', 'do', 'make', 'put', etc., as in *make sport, put attention*;
- ascribing new meanings to service words, as in *I back to Korea next week etc.*;

2. ELF phonetic peculiarities

- substitutions of the 'th', resulting in pronunciations of th-words which do not correspond to the norms of Standard English, as in 'think' pronounced as 'tink', 'sink', or 'fink';
- changes in vowel quality, resulting in non-standard English pronunciations, as in 'cake' pronounced as /kaik/;
- shift in word stress, as in 'perfectionist' pronounced PERfectionist;
- non-use of connected speech features such as elision and assimilation etc.

These non-core features, as some ELF researchers claim (Jenkins, 2000; Cogo, 2008 etc.) are considered acceptable and not regarded as mistakes if they do not interfere with speech comprehension.

However, focusing on deviations in the use of grammatical, lexical and phonetic forms of Standard English and presenting them as characteristic features of English as a lingua franca takes the attention of linguists and language teachers away from the essential differences of ELF from national standards. These differences spring from the functional roles that national variants of English perform as compared to the use of ELF in communicative function of connecting people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. ELF, unlike major national standards of English, is not used for expressing one's national or ethnic identity, and it is culturally neutral. Traditionally, languages have been closely connected with cultures of the peoples who used them. When English, before it had acquired the global status, was used as one of the most widespread international languages, it was, in its status of a foreign language, closely associated with national cultures of major English-speaking nations. However, at present, as English is used for worldwide communication, a new, global culture emerges, and the global culture values become part of the identity of members of ELF speakers' community alongside with their ethnic and national identities.

3. Teaching English as the global language

The global ELF researchers come out against the continuing practice of using two major variants of the English language, American English (AmE) and British English (BrE), in teaching English in national systems of education of countries where English is not an official language. The EFL phonetic aspect researcher, Jennifer Jenkins, speaking at the first EFL conference in Helsinki in 2008, pointed out: “Giving the well-established sociolinguistic fact that languages are shaped by their users, and that nowadays native speakers are in a minority for English language use, it would make sense for English language teaching to move away from its almost exclusive focus on native varieties of English” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 10). As an example of the inconsistency in furthering national pronunciation norms with new sociolinguistic realities, Jenkins refers to the continuing support of British normative pronunciation norms RP (Received Pronunciation) in the systems of English language teaching to foreigners. In spite of the fact that English as the global language is used mainly for realizing interlingual communication between non-native speakers of English, materials for teaching English, particularly in Europe, still present RP as an exemplary model of pronunciation norms.

The main arguments of those who oppose using pronunciation standards of national varieties of English, including a new argument that the native speakers of English have lost their right of ownership since the number of English language speakers as L2 has considerably exceeded the population of all English speaking countries, are not supported not only by teachers and heads of English language schools, but also by those sociolinguists who come out for following the existing language standards. Thus, Trudgill, speaking in support of the national standard varieties, stated: “Even if the native speakers do not own the English language, it is important that it stems from them, particularly historically, and resides in them” (Trudgill, & Hanna, 2002).

While we agree that teaching English in new conditions when English has acquired the global status, and is used in worldwide communication does not fit into the traditional language teaching paradigm based on treating English as one of foreign languages and, therefore, strictly following its national standards, we argue that the differences in English language teaching at present must be seen in cultural rather than other aspects. Teaching English as the global language must be culturally neutral, and English when it is taught as the language of interlingual and intercultural communication must not be confused with major national standards of English so as to avoid the effects of cultural domination, which would undermine ethnic and cultural identities of the language learners.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have endeavored to determine the nature of English as the global language, particularly in its form of English as the global lingua franca (EGLF), and to point out the consequences of the English language having acquired the global status to language teaching practices. English used for worldwide communication in its form of EGLF does not coincide with any of the national varieties of English. It has its own extensively growing language community of EGFL speakers and it is culturally neutral in relation to major national cultures of the English language, that is the cultures of AmE and BrE. EGFL speakers, alongside with their national identities also acquire new, global identities, and increasingly share new, global cultural values.

Of particular interest are pedagogic and methodological aspects connected with teaching English as the global lingua franca. The language of globalization is English, and English language skills have turned into one of the major competencies of the person of the knowledge society, and, therefore, the current approaches to English language education, which treat English as one of the “foreign languages”, must be revised. The continuing language practices, when English is taught as one of the major English language national variants pose a threat to ethnic and cultural identities in the world where globalization is often understood as Americanization.

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